

THE ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROFESSIONAL SECURITY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION LECTURER

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ABSTRACT

The widening of access to higher education (HE) for more students has been a strategic priority of the South African (SA) Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) over the past decade. Simultaneously, lecturers are increasingly held to account for providing quality teaching and delivering employable graduates. Yet their work environment is characterised by poor support, lack of recognition for teaching efforts, and absence of legal protection when failing to fulfil the undefined yet high accountability expectations in their teaching-related work. Within existing HE research the authors could not find a clear definition of accountability or of professional security specifically related to the work of the HE lecturer. This study thus aimed to develop definitions for these concepts by means of a review of the legal framework for accountability and security in SA HE, and a qualitative empirical study. The latter was approached from an interpretive-phenomenological perspective to develop a clear understanding of how SA lecturers involved in undergraduate teaching at three SA universities perceive accountability and security within their labour environment. From the analysis and interpretation of semi-structured and focus group interview data, seven meaningful themes were identified, associated with either lecturer accountability or security. The findings thus offer not only a clear delineation of internal and external teaching-related accountability, but also a comprehensive definition of lecturer professional security.

Keywords: higher education law, higher education teaching, labour rights, lecturer accountability, security, support, teaching responsibilities, working conditions, quality in higher education

INTRODUCTION

The global nature and extensive reach of HE transformation over the past fifty years have

resulted in significant changes to the nature, demands and end goals of HE (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley 2009, iii; Harvey and Williams 2010, 3). The focus of such transformation is always in a state of flux, depending on the concerned government's political ideology and strategic priorities for economic growth and social development. Archer (2008, 385) maintains that the responsibilities and requirements of academic work are, likewise, always in an evolving state. Worldwide, transformation over the past two decades has, in fact, seen academic work shift from "a relatively autonomous profession operating within a self-regulated code of collegiality, to an organisationally managed workforce" (Hazelkorn 2011, 12), with increased accountability at the heart of labour practices. Lecturer accountability for teaching quality and learning achievements of an ever-growing number of students is identified as imperative to the well-being of individuals, industry and society as a whole (Harvey and Williams 2010, 3; Stanley 2012, 3). Yet these accountability demands are not supported by a corresponding increase in academic staff appointments (Altbach et al. 2009, 90; Toma 2008, 95), while lecturers perceive their work to have become increasingly fragmented, overly scrutinised, and their workload steadily increasing year after year (Akerlind 2005, 5; Toma 2008, 95). Feigenbaum and Iqani (2013, 61) summarise the concern in global HE circles aptly when they affirm that lecturers "cannot be expected to continue to provide evidence of quality assurance without the provisions of adequate support, time and resources needed to make real changes to teaching practices and learning environments".

Massification – the required widening of access to and participation in HE for more students (Altbach 2013, 8; Stanley 2012, 3) – has also been a strategic priority of the SA DHET over the past decade. In 2015 student enrolments at SA public HE institutions stood at 985 212 with the national HE enrolment target at 1.6 million students by 2030 (DHET 2017, 2), while the total number of permanent academic staff employed by SA public institutions in 2015 had been only 18 566 (DHET 2017, 23). While enrolment targets for 2030 requires substantial growth in academic staff numbers, there is an apparent lack of governmental academic capacity building initiatives. It is evident that in SA, as in other parts of the world, the academic profession is stretched to breaking point, which often results in less student support and "a poorer learning environment for students, in part because the academic profession has not grown fast enough to keep up with this expansion" (Altbach 2013, 22).

Whereas massification has resulted in increased accountability and overemphasis on quality assurance mechanisms in global HE, greater access will continue to equal increased drop-out rates as long as nothing is done to dwindling resources and support for lecturers in their teaching-related work (Altbach 2013, 23). The DHET (South Africa 2013, xiv) also recognises that, although increased access to HE is imperative, large numbers of students

entering the HE system are of little value without corresponding upturns in student success. Poor support for lecturer professional development as well as a lack of recognition and reward for excellence in undergraduate teaching are identified as prime reasons for low student success rates (DHET 2013, 32). Yet, while student success is unequivocally linked to the quality of teaching, the SA government's transformation agenda for HE has not in practice begun to address the necessity of a balance between the call for accountability for student success and corresponding support and funding for capacity-building of the academe.

Logically, all of the mentioned issues should have resulted in governments and academic institutions prioritising the professional development, upliftment and legal protection of the people responsible for providing quality educational experiences to the future workforce and leaders of global communities. Yet Bentley et al. (2013, 1) wonder about the little attention being paid to the sustainability and security of the academic profession despite the fact that a "vibrant academic profession attracting the best and brightest of the next generation may indeed be what gives a nation a competitive edge in a global knowledge-based economy".

The preceding discussion has given a clear indication that lecturers in any modern-day university, also in South Africa, are becoming increasingly vulnerable to factors such as an unrealistic workload without corresponding increases in resources or recognition; deteriorating employment conditions; and lack of professional recognition. Yet there is an ever-increasing demand for greater accountability for student success and graduate employability. Within this context, an exploration of the nature of lecturer teaching-related accountability and the influence thereof on lecturers' perceived security in their labour environment thus seemed appropriate. How do lecturers perceive their accountability in teaching-related work, and what are their opinions and perspectives on the nature of their security in light of such accountability? For purposes of this article, the concepts of lecturer accountability and security were mainly investigated from a labour law perspective, with constitutional rights protection and statutory regulation of the HE labour environment as basis to position accountability and security as research foci.

ACCOUNTABILITY AS RESEARCH FOCUS

Within a legal context accountability has the inherently distinctive meaning of "a state of being liable, answerable, or accountable", thus inferring that "some legal rule(s) exists under which a theory or claim can be made to find one liable in a civil law suit or culpable in a criminal matter" (Law.Com Dictionary 2014). Unlike the distinctive meaning inherent to accountability in legal context, when this phenomenon is qualitatively researched and interpreted to express the perspectives of individuals outside of a legal context, it may become endowed with a different

connotation. Each individual interprets it from his or her context which is influenced by, amongst others, culture and work environment, giving rise to multiple realities of that phenomenon (Smit 2010, 35; Newby 2010, 35). Since the legal definition for accountability would have been restrictive within the context of an interpretive-phenomenological approach, a more general conceptual definition for accountability was used as basis for the development of the concept in the context of this study: “the obligation of an individual or organisation to account for his or its activities, accept responsibility for them, and to disclose the results in a transparent manner” (Business Dictionary 2014a).

Accountability thus implies an account-giving relationship between organisations and individuals or between individuals in different employment positions. The accountee is obliged to explain any and all decisions taken and actions performed, while the accouter will judge those decisions and actions based on certain transparent benchmarks or standards (Bovens 2007, 450). Literature also distinguishes between external and internal accountability: individuals and organisations accounting for decisions, standards and conduct to external stakeholders (Berdahl 2006, 171; Burke 2004, 3) as compared to employees being held accountable for their decisions and actions within the organisation (Burke 2004, 3; Hall et al. 2007, 407).

As a starting point in this study, the accountability of the lecturer was therefore simply defined as the obligation of lecturers to take responsibility for expected tasks, and account for their conduct and for expected outcomes of their teaching-related work. As later discussed, this definition was expanded with the data relating to the nature of teaching-related accountability generated by the participating lecturers in this study.

SECURITY AS RESEARCH FOCUS

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2013) provides a range of definitions for security: “the quality or state of being secure; freedom from physical danger and fear, anxiety or apprehension; freedom from the prospect of being laid off (job security); measures taken to guard against crime or attack; confidence in one’s safety or well-being”. These definitions indicate the complexity of the concept and its many applications, and point to the fact that there may be elements other than the obvious physical dimension that determine how individuals perceive their own security.

Although the physical dimension is recognised as important to lecturer security, the focus of this study was not on the lecturer’s physical safety in the workplace, nor on the issue of job security, normally equated with the assurance of the “continuity of gainful employment” and a stable income (Business Dictionary 2014b). Rather, security was approached from a labour law

perspective, referring to the protection of the rights of lecturers in their employment environment. Locke and Bennion (2013, 223) provide impetus for exploring lecturer security from such a perspective when they maintain that lecturers have become increasingly vulnerable in recent times, and this vulnerability is attached to factors such as deteriorating employment conditions and issues with regard to the questionable status and increasing responsibilities of the academic profession. The focus of the empirical inquiry into this phenomenon thus included aspects pertaining to the nature of security that lecturers derive from the protection of their human rights, analysis and evaluation of existing institutional as well as national HE legislative instruments that influence lecturer security in the workplace, their employment conditions, health and safety regulation and labour rights, the regulation of their responsibilities and workload, and their declining professional status.

A review of recent scholarly work on the topic of lecturer security produced very few results, and the limited number of investigations mostly focused on either physical or campus security, or job security and job satisfaction of lecturers (Carney 2013; Gappa 2010; Gover et al. 2011; Kärnä et al. 2013; Reeves 2014; Shin and Jung 2014; Woolfolk 2013). A meaningful definition for the security of lecturers in their employment environment could thus not be found.

The first part of the investigation was aimed at defining the existing SA legal framework for lecturer accountability and security to determine either its regulatory or protective function regarding lecturer teaching-related responsibilities or rights.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ACCOUNTABILITY AND SECURITY OF THE SA LECTURER

A lecturer's accountability can either be regulated by sources of law external to the institution, thus national legal sources, or by legal sources of an institutional nature, namely institutional policies, rules or regulations.

National legal sources

For purposes of this article, national sources of law that lay the existing juridical foundation for lecturer accountability include the provisions of the SA Constitution (South Africa 108/1996), national HE and labour legislation, relevant legislation pertaining to public administration, and relevant case law, international and foreign law. These statutes also determine the measure of security afforded to lecturers in their work environment.

The SA Constitution

The provisions of the SA Constitution (South Africa 108/1996) (hereafter referred to as the

Constitution), and more specifically the Bill of Rights, are the embodiment of South Africa's democracy and set out the legal rules whereby the country must be governed. The notion of accountability is deeply entrenched in the democratic principles, values and ideals of the Constitution. In section 3 of the Constitution it is stated that all SA citizens are "equally entitled to the rights, privileges and benefits of citizenship", but with those rights and privileges come the expectation that every citizen will fulfil certain duties and responsibilities. All role players in the HE system, including lecturers, students, administrators and managers, are bound to account for the enactment of their rights, the respect of the rights of others, as well as their actions, or the lack thereof, that may infringe on those rights. As such, the values entrenched in the Constitution form the legal foundation for the accountability of the HE lecturer. A productive and secure HE environment is only possible if the values and rights entrenched in the Constitution are observed and lived as part of a HE institutional culture.

The constitutional framework for accountability and security is therefore grounded in those constitutional rights impacting directly on the work of lecturers in their employment context. The lecturer's rights to equality (s. 9 of the Constitution) and human dignity (s. 10), and the obligation to likewise treat others with respect, underpin the juridical foundation for lecturer accountability and security in the workplace. The other fundamental rights that were analysed and found to inform lecturer accountability and security are: a) the right to freedom and security of the person (s. 12), referring to the protection of both bodily and psychological integrity, and a work environment that is safe and not harmful to the well-being of employees; the right to freedom of expression (s. 16), inclusive of the right to academic freedom specifically pertinent to the work of the lecturer; the right to fair labour practices (s. 23) and mutually beneficial employer-employee relations as further codified in the provisions of national labour legislation, inclusive of the right to freedom of association (s. 18) relevant to lecturers in that they can affiliate with bodies such as trade unions for protection of their minimum conditions of employment; and the right to administrative action (s. 29) that is lawful, reasonable and procedurally fair.

HE-specific legal sources

HE-specific national legal instruments such as the Higher Education Act (South Africa 101/1997), the National Qualifications Framework Act (South Africa 67/2008), the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (DHET 2014a), and the White Paper for Post-school Education and Training (DHET 2013) clearly make provision for a unified national system of HE, ensure coherence of the HE system by specifying the articulation routes between qualifications and the standards required at the exit level of every qualification, and contains

provisions for planning, establishing, governing and managing HE in South Africa. There is a focus on transformation and redress to enhance international comparability of standards, while answering to the specific societal needs of the country and its people. Lecturer accountability and security, though, are not addressed in HE-specific legal sources.

National labour legislation

The Labour Relations Act (South Africa 66/1995) (LRA) sets out the determinants that regulate labour in South Africa. It is guided by Section 23 of the Constitution, which entrenches the right to fair labour practices and the rights of workers and employers to form organisations for collective bargaining. Together with the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (South Africa 75/1997a) (BCEA), it also ensures social justice by establishing the rights and duties of employers and employees, and lays down certain minimum conditions of employment through the creation of secure, equitable and harmonious working relationship. It is evident that the protection of the constitutional rights of employees, finds application in the provisions of the LRA and the BCEA, and that these provisions are essential in the context of lecturer workplace security. Yet Smit (2013, 301) maintains that the employment rights of HE lecturers are most often negatively influenced by “unfair labour practices, unfair discrimination, sexual harassment, and the erosion of academic freedom”, implying that in practice, lecturers do not experience high measures of security from the provisions of the Constitution or national labour legislation. Although the LRA and BCEA thus provide ample general conditions for fair labour practices, while the Employment Equity Act (South Africa 55/1998) and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (South Africa 4/2000b) protect the right of employees to equality in the workplace and the elimination of any form of unfair discrimination, it does not satisfy the search for specific reference to the teaching-related accountability of the lecturer.

As the results of the review of SA HE and labour legislation do not provide guidelines for the teaching-related accountability of a lecturer, a logical assumption was that such guidelines would be included in institutional sources of law, such as policies, rules, and employment contracts.

Institutional sources of law¹

The general nature of institutional regulation of the teaching-related accountability and institutional protection of the rights of SA lecturers were reviewed, with specific reference to relevant institutional policies, rules and regulations pertaining to human rights and employment equity, fair labour practices, occupational health and safety, staff development and promotion,

and the regulation of just administrative action.

In accordance with section 32 of the HE Act (South Africa 101/1997b), any university in South Africa is officially established by way of a Statute published as a Government notice in the *Government Gazette*. University statutes include references to the appointment, remuneration, discipline and annual performance evaluations of academic staff, but these are of a general nature and do not address specific rights or responsibilities of lecturers. The enhancement of the quality of teaching through staff development initiatives, and recognition for teaching excellence, are main strategic foci for the core function of university teaching. Although clear on institutional directives, university strategic plans do not provide the detail for lecturer responsibilities or expected conduct in the teaching environment.

As is evident from the types of policies and rules consulted and analysed, national legislation in this regard has been adequately enacted in institutional legal sources to ensure avenues available to institutional management and HE employees to address legal issues pertaining to human rights protection and regulation of employment relations. The mere existence and availability of such institutional legal instruments do not necessarily guarantee adherence to all their provisions. But it stands to reason that, in cases where lecturers feel that there is an infringement on any of their constitutional or labour rights, they can turn to the provisions in the concerned institutional policies and rules for restitution.

Institutions have developed an array of policies, rules and regulations related to the rights and expected conduct of South African lecturers. Some policies, such as the Human Rights Policy, Policy on Employees with Disabilities and the Occupational Health and Safety Policy, protect the employees' constitutional and labour rights. There are also policies on human resources management and staff development, for instance the Remuneration Policy, Recruitment Policy, Training and Development Policy, Performance Management Policy and the Academic Staff Promotion Policy. Of special importance for this research are the Codes of conduct for academic staff, such as the Code of Professional and Ethical Conduct, and the Disciplinary regulations contained in the Disciplinary Code and Procedure and the Employee Grievance Procedure.

Policies on remuneration and promotion are noticeably vague and merely indicate that both these employment issues are considered by faculty management based on merit and sustainable affordability within the faculty budget. Similarly, resource allocation to provide for appropriate support for lecturers to do their work to the best of their abilities is only mentioned as part of the responsibility of institutional management. It was assumed at this point that employment issues related to teaching responsibilities and the minimum conditions of employment of lecturers would thus rather be included in lecturer employment contracts.

Universities also have policies that provide certain broad parameters for decisions within the teaching environment (e.g., policies on teaching and learning, assessment and moderation, work-integrated learning, and programme evaluations), yet none of these policies offer a delineation of the teaching-related responsibilities of the lecturer that will ensure the enhancement of student learning. Since the quality of teaching is mainly the responsibility of the lecturers, it stands to reason that teaching-related policies should clearly define the expectations for what quality teaching and learning entail, and also provide guidance in terms of lecturer responsibilities that can be enacted in faculty strategic initiatives and subsequent teaching practices at programme and subject level. These policies should be updated at regular intervals to reflect transformation in the HE environment and an institution's dedication to the quality of teaching to promote the quality of student learning (Barrie, Ginns and Prosser 2005, 641). Yet evidence of such policy guidance could not be found.

In addition to national legislation, collective agreements between employers and trade unions (and bargaining council agreements), and the provisions of the employment contract, are recognised as the main sources of individual employee rights and obligations (Van Niekerk et al. 2008, 105). The employment contract is founded on consensus between the contractual parties and grounded in the principles of the law of contract (Van Niekerk et al. 2008, 106). Contractual liability in cases of breach of contract between a lecturer and a university can only be determined if the rights, obligations and expected conduct of the lecturer are clearly demarcated and indicated in the employment contract.

Basson et al. (2009, 46–47) and Du Plessis and Fouché (2006, 15) maintain that it is an employer's responsibility to accept the employee into service, to pay appropriate remuneration, and to provide a safe and healthy workplace. Furthermore, the employer is responsible for employment conditions that are not only fair, but adhere to the provisions of all relevant national labour legislation and guidelines for task requirements to assist employees to effectively fulfil their responsibilities. In the absence of institutional policy regulation of lecturer accountability in teaching-related work, it is thus logical to assume that such guidelines would be included in the lecturer employment contract. This assumption is underscored by Poskanzer (2002, 19), who maintains that the employment contract of academic staff should establish the rights and obligations of both the HE institution and the lecturer. He describes the contractual relationship as the “terms under which faculty are appointed and promoted, the conditions under which they will perform their academic duties, and the institution's expectations about teaching, research, and service responsibilities”. The SA Labour Guide (2014) stipulates that the employment contract has a dual purpose:

- “aligned to the provisions of national labour legislation, the employment contract must clearly stipulate what an employee “is entitled to receive in terms of company policy and benefits”; and
- “it should regulate the employee’s conduct since all company policies and procedures, as well as the disciplinary code, form a part of the employment contract.”

The above stipulations indicate the protective function of the contract of employment, but also lay the foundation for the accountability of the employee to fulfil the obligations stipulated therein. It is important to note that institutional policies and procedure, as well as institutional disciplinary codes and codes of conduct are deemed to be part of the employment contract (SA Labour Guide 2014). The employee, in signing the employment contract, is therefore also obliged to adhere to the stipulations in those institutional legal documents.

According to Grogan (2003, 31), there are some essential elements that must be present to make an employment contract valid, amongst others the fact that the contract must be a voluntary agreement (consensus) between at least two legal parties, and that an employee agrees to perform certain specified and/or implied duties.

Last-mentioned element once again points to the fact that the contract of employment should include guidelines to employees as to the behaviours and duties they can expect to be held accountable for (Beckham 2005, 89). Grogan (2003, 54) refers to these guidelines as the required standards of competence to perform the duties expected of the employee. It stands to reason that individuals who accept the post of lecturer to undergraduate students at an academic institution should be “capable of performing the tasks they agree to perform, and that they will carry them out with reasonable efficiency” (Grogan 2003, 54). The tasks to be performed, and the standard for efficiency of task performance, should thus be clearly communicated to the employee.

To determine whether a typical employment contract between a lecturer and a university as employer adheres to the expectation of clear guidelines for and regulation of lecturer responsibilities and conduct, the content of a number of employment contracts for permanent academic staff was analysed. The common provisions of these academic employment contracts show that each provision is linked to either a regulatory or a protective function (Basson et al. 2009; Du Plessis and Fouché 2006; Grogan 2003; Van Niekerk et al. 2008) for purposes of lecturer accountability or security.

The investigation into employment contracts of South African permanent academic staff showed that these contracts include a letter of appointment that regulate the main tasks and expectations in terms of key performance areas (teaching, research, administrative and service responsibilities) related to the expertise and abilities of the staff member as explained in the job

description for the duration of the contract. The contract protects the employer and the employee in that the signing of the contract implies that both parties consent to the job requirements in the contract and agrees that the performance of the stated duties is possible and reasonable.

Employment contracts also determine adherence to and active promotion of the institutional mission, values and principles. This regulates the requirement of the employee to act in good faith (fiduciary duty – the employee must act in the best interest of the employer). Annual performance management and reviews are also stipulated, which protects the employee's development and career advancement or promotion opportunities. Other matters referred to in contracts are the use of university resources, matters pertaining to intellectual property rights, work outside of the normal activities, confidentiality of information, conflict of interest, adherence to the university disciplinary code, and conditions of service.

It is evident that the standard employment contract of SA lecturers in permanent positions adhere to the general labour requirements as provided for in applicable national labour legislation. Furthermore, as is evident from the function of each of the common provisions, the employment contracts fulfil the dual purpose of regulation of lecturer activities, and protection of lecturer rights and benefits that arise from the employment relationship that is established by the agreement. Without exception, each of the scrutinised employment contracts stipulates that the employee, in signing the agreement, also agrees to adhere to the stipulations of all institutional policies, rules, regulations and concerned codes of employee conduct. The expected ethical or professional conduct of the lecturer, though not provided for in national legislation, is thus regulated via institutional codes of conduct. The results of the review of the selection of employment contracts indicate that, in all but one element, namely the specification of the teaching-related responsibilities of a lecturer, the provisions of the concerned employment agreements fulfil the general requirements for a valid and fair employment contract.

Although the respective letters of appointment indicate that the lecturer's responsibilities would encompass certain duties and expectations in the key performance areas of teaching, research, administration and service, such responsibilities or duties remain vague and the standards for effective fulfilment of such responsibilities are not specified. It is therefore the contention of the authors that the teaching-related accountability of lecturers involved in undergraduate teaching cannot be determined through the content and provisions of lecturer employment contracts. In the absence of adequate provision for such regulation, even at institutional level in the SA HE environment, it was therefore deemed necessary to turn to the lecturers themselves in order to determine how they perceive their teaching-related

accountability and subsequent security in their employment contexts.

RESEARCH AIM

In the absence of a clear definition in existing literature and legal HE frameworks of accountability and professional security of lecturers, this study aimed to develop comprehensive understanding and subsequent definitions for these concepts by means of an extensive literature review and a qualitative empirical study to fill the gaps in existing literature. Against the backdrop of the complexities elucidated in the introduction and legal framework of this article, the empirical inquiry aimed at developing in-depth understanding of how SA lecturers experience and perceive: a) their teaching-related accountability in their labour environment; and b) the protection (or lack of protection) of their rights and their subsequent professional security.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Paradigm and methodology: In-depth understanding of lecturer accountability and security was acquired by following an interactive qualitative methodology, grounded in the interpretive paradigm, more specifically from an interpretive-phenomenological perspective. In essence, interpretive-phenomenological research denotes inquiry whereby the researcher employs an inductive strategy to examine personal context-specific human experiences and interprets the meanings that people attribute to those experiences (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008, 215; Creswell 2009, 13; Maree 2007, 176). As such, knowledge emerges through dialogue, and understanding is located in a particular context through the eyes of the participants and the interpretation of the researcher (Smit 2010, 35). The focus of the inquiry was thus on uncovering, analysing and interpreting the meanings that lecturers attached to the phenomena of accountability and security within their employment context, more specifically in their teaching-related work.

Methods of data generation: To allow for the generation of in-depth information regarding participants' knowledge, experiences and perceptions of accountability and security, the research was conducted via face-to-face semi-structured individual and focus group interviews with participants at three purposefully selected SA universities. It is acknowledged that the empirical inquiry was delimited by the semi-structured interview schedule of which the broader themes and initial questions had been pre-determined by deductive reasoning during the review and analysis of the existing internal and external legal sources that form the juridical foundation for lecturer accountability and security. As such, the interview schedule was structured according to four topics of inquiry: the teaching-related responsibilities; professional status;

accountability; and the rights protection and security of the lecturer.

Participant selection: The research participants at three selected public universities in SA were HE lecturers in permanent academic positions, in possession of at least a Master's degree in their field of study, involved in undergraduate teaching. Through the method of non-probability, purposive sampling, and for maximum variation in generated data, the participants were selected from different faculties and disciplines with the aim of generating data from various contexts to provide rich descriptions of the phenomena. Consistent with qualitative research principles, the aim was not to generalise the findings, but rather to explore a variety of perspectives and opinions in order to develop in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation from within these different contexts.

Methods of data analysis: The epistemological and ontological premises of the interpretive-phenomenological approach suggest that only through in-depth inductive analysis and interpretation (as applied in this research) can knowledge and understanding be developed of the context-specific, socially constructed, multiple realities different individuals attach to the same phenomenon (Best and Kahn 2003, 243; Creswell 2003, 144; Merriam 2002, 5). To offer a deeper, more complete or more comprehensive view and understanding of the phenomena under investigation, still allowing for the acknowledgment of multiple realities of research participants (Tobin and Begley 2004, 393), data were generated in the form of responses to open-ended questions by multiple participants in either individual or focus group semi-structured interviews. Atlas.ti version 7 was used for support in the management, extraction, coding, annotating, organising, exploring, and comparing of the raw data (Stewart 2012, 503). After first and second cycle coding, reflection, re-coding, and organising of codes into categories, the original four topics of the interview schedule either became absorbed by emerging categories, or developed to such an extent that they became elevated to the level of research themes. Subsequently, the main findings of the inquiry are reported.

FINDINGS

From the rigorous processes of analysis, interpretation and abstraction, seven meaningful themes associated with either lecturer accountability or lecturer security emerged. Four of the themes are clearly linked to the phenomenon of lecturer accountability, while the three remaining themes that emerged from the data relate to the phenomenon of lecturer security.

A summary of the main findings from the empirical inquiry for each of the seven themes are subsequently presented.

The lecturer's voice on theme 1: Teaching-related lecturer accountability

Although participating lecturers clearly lack knowledge of the legal foundation of accountability and its regulation in the labour context, from their responses emerged the fact that they view their teaching-related accountability to encompass answerability for a) teaching responsibilities, b) expected conduct, c) student success, and d) graduate employability. Literature associated with the social sciences often use answerability as synonym for accountability (Bovens 2007; Erkkilä 2007; McGee and Gaventa 2010, 13; Salmi 2008), since any normal-functioning social system requires answerability for both favourable and unfavourable behaviours, thereby establishing accountability as a fundamental element in workplace relations (Breux et al. 2009, 307).

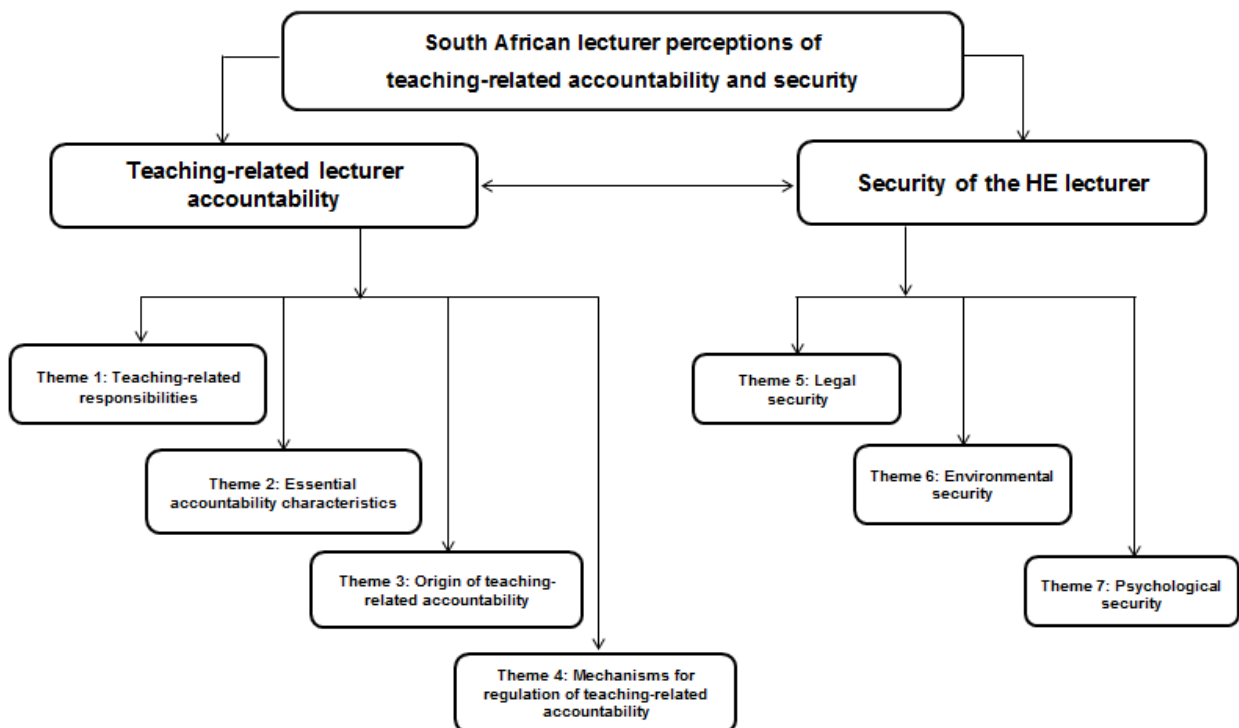


Figure 1: The perceptions of SA lecturers regarding their teaching-related accountability and the nature of their security

Participants noted the aim of being accountable in their teaching-related work as the improvement of the quality of teaching and student support with a view to enhance student success and graduate employability. To realise this aim, there needs to be a clearer delineation of diverse teaching responsibilities to improve the regulation of teaching workload. If employees feel that the demands of their responsibilities are so diverse that it “extends beyond their capabilities”, they may experience accountability as a threat, resulting in a negative influence on their security (Hall et al. 2006, 90).

Participants were clear on the fact that answerability for protection of student rights is overemphasised often to the detriment of lecturer rights protection. The establishment of a professional body for lecturers, a professional code of conduct, and fair sanctions if expected standards are transgressed are elements that emerged from the empirical study to enhance both accountability and lecturer protection.

The lecturer's voice on theme 2: Characteristics of teaching-related accountability

According to the participants, accountability encompasses an account-giving relationship requiring answerability for context-specific teaching-related responsibilities, expected lecturer conduct, and student success, to multiple internal and external stakeholders. Hall et al. (2006, 88) concur when they note that accountability becomes recognisable only when the employee is answerable to someone for fulfilling specified tasks. Participating lecturers identified collegial and self-accountability as preferable to external accountability, while reciprocal transparency between management and lecturers is indicated as essential to enhance accountability. This is important as Cheng (2012, 791) and Hall et al. (2007, 407) emphasise that for accountability to become an instrument for improvement instead of control in the academic environment, academics have to realise that personal ethics and values are essential elements in the notion of professionalism, and that they need to hold themselves and one another to account for their decisions and conduct to the benefit of their stakeholders.

The lecturer's voice on theme 3: The origin of lecturer teaching-related accountability

Participants deem intrinsic values and ethical codes, institutional policy documents, and legal sources external to the institution (e.g. legislation, professional body requirements) as originating sources for accountability. While Poskanzer (2002, 21) concurs that written institutional rules and regulations must regulate the basic activities of its employees and define "the legal rights and duties of members of the academic community" as derived from legally binding institutional policies founded on applicable national legislation, participants indicate that employment contracts, institutional policies, rules and task agreements are often outdated and vague regarding teaching-related responsibilities. This is in contradiction to the view held by Barrie et al. (2005, 641) that institutional regulatory documents should be updated at regular intervals to reflect transformation in the HE environment, clear accountability requirements, and an institution's dedication to the quality of teaching to promote the quality of student learning.

The lecturers' voice on theme 4: Mechanisms for regulation of lecturer accountability

Participants identified mechanisms that regulate teaching-related accountability as institutional audits, programme reviews, student evaluations and complaints, and peer reviews. This is in line with an observation by Cheng (2010, 260) who notes that institutional audits/reviews are mechanisms most often employed to measure the effectiveness of the quality assurance mechanisms of institutions to successfully meet their missions and objectives. Harvey and Williams (2010, 3, 7) summarise global research and scholarly opinions on the value of external quality audits in HE over the past 15 years as “not particularly good at encouraging improvement, especially when they had a strong accountability brief”. This is reiterated by participants who experience continuous external regulation as distrust in lecturer capabilities that impact their perceived security negatively. The audit/review focuses more on institutional accountability while academic staff seldom experience a sense of ownership of the audit process or the results thereof, finding such mechanisms burdensome (Al-Maskari 2014, 37). While student evaluations of teaching skills are noted as prominent yet unfair mechanisms to determine accountability, peer review is identified as an appropriate and trusted mechanism to determine teaching effectiveness. This is echoed by Dill and Beerkens (2012, 351, 354) who emphasise the strong preference for internal benchmarking, collegial accountability, and peer review in the academe.

The lecturer's voice on theme 5: Legal security

Legal security from the participants' perspectives refers to lecturer rights protection and fairness in administrative matters as afforded by the stipulations of national and institutional legal sources. Section 3 of the Constitution infers that lecturers are “equally entitled to the rights, privileges and benefits of citizenship”, and links those rights and privileges with the expectation of the fulfilment of certain duties and responsibilities. Furthermore, the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act (South Africa 3/2000a) forms the statutory basis for the judicial review of administrative actions by providing for the rights, duties and remedies thereof (Currie and De Waal 2015, 646).

Administrative law should protect individuals and organisations against the misuse of administrative power by bodies that exercise public powers or perform public functions, and should promote procedural fairness while protecting the public interest, thus also relevant within the HE environment (Hoexter 2007, 2).

Although there exists a clear lack of awareness of the legal framework for the protection

of their labour rights, participants have in common a sense of dissatisfaction with their working conditions and the absence of legal protection and lecturer-specific rights in a unique labour environment. This perspective is in direct contrast to UNESCO's (1997, 27) requirement that "Working conditions for higher-education teaching personnel should be such as will best promote effective teaching, scholarship, research and extension work and enable higher-education teaching personnel to carry out their professional tasks". This principle speaks directly to the enhancement of the security of lecturers and relates to the provisions of labour legislation that should regulate the unique working environment of the HE lecturer.

The lecturer's voice on theme 6: Environmental security

Environmental security describes the nature of protection of lecturer working conditions, inclusive of the support that they receive to enable them to fulfil their teaching-related responsibilities effectively. Lecturers identify job security, institutional and collegial support, and appropriate resources as crucial to enhance environmental security; yet these factors are inadequate in their work environment. In the White Paper for post-school education and training (DHET 2013, 35) the DHET acknowledges the "unrealistic teaching loads and high student-to-staff ratios" and lack of sufficient resources due to the massive forced expansion of student enrolments, yet the cry for more publications and the promise of more funding for research have not decreased.

Rewards for teaching excellence are scarce: promotion opportunities are primarily dependent on research outputs, negatively impacting lecturers' environmental security. This correlates with scholarly views like those of Chalmers (2011, 25), Carney (2013, 66), and Young (2006, 92) on the lack of rewards and recognition for teaching excellence in the global HE context "while professional rewards for research have been explicit" (Cretchley et al. 2014, 652). Participants associate bureaucracy, cumbersome workload and diverse responsibilities as detrimental to well-being, job satisfaction, and environmental security

The lecturer's voice on theme 7: Psychological security

Psychological security implies the protection of the psychological health and well-being of the lecturer and the effective management of psychological risk factors. Section 12 of the Bill of Rights entrenches the rights to safety and security of individuals. When applied within the HE environment, section 12 could thus be called upon to protect lecturers from different forms of abuse and threats to physical or psychological security imposed by government, employers (e.g. HE institutions), students or colleagues.

Participants indicate that overregulation points to distrust in lecturers' abilities to be

effective in their work, negatively impacting their psychological security. Opportunities for personal and professional growth, personal value, respect and recognition are seen as conditions for psychological security. Yet participants experience little acknowledgement or appreciation for efforts in teaching-related work. According to Kinman and Court (2010, 424), lecturers need support, inclusive of appropriate encouragement and respect, from university management and from their peers, in order to experience security in their working environment. Such support will enhance levels of psychological well-being, commitment to job performance and job satisfaction. Yet, Morley (2003, 5) asserts that over past decades universities have become “sites of social anxiety and fear” where trust in professional conduct has eroded, risk has increased and academics seem to have lost much of their autonomy, authority and academic freedom. The professional status of the lecturer’s work is an issue of controversy and debate, clearly linked to lecturer psychological insecurity.

Ultimately, analysis of the above findings offered a clear delineation of internal and external teaching-related accountability and a comprehensive definition of lecturer professional security that could not be found during the analysis of legal sources or the literature overview for this research. These definitions are subsequently offered as a valuable contribution to HE literature.

CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY: DEFINING ACCOUNTABILITY AND SECURITY OF HE LECTURERS

The four meaningful themes that emerged from the empirical study for the phenomenon of lecturer accountability are noteworthy in that it offers a clear definition for lecturer teaching-related internal and external accountability in the SA HE context:

“Lecturers perceive their teaching-related accountability to encompass answerability to external and internal stakeholders. External accountability requires of lecturers answerability to government, prospective graduate employers, professional bodies and the broader public for teaching quality that ultimately aims for graduate employability. Internal accountability requires of lecturers answerability to themselves, institutional and faculty management, colleagues and students for: a) agreed task requirements and performance standards in pre-teaching, teaching, and post-teaching responsibilities; b) expected professional conduct; and c) student success.”

The three themes that emerged for lecturer security are significant in that their integration provides a comprehensive definition of lecturer security that could not be found during the analysis of legal sources or the elaborate literature overview for this study:

“Lecturer security in a professional employment context encompasses: a) legal security in terms

of an adequate national and institutional legal framework for lecturer rights protection; b) environmental security in terms of effective strategies to retain, recognise, professionally develop and adequately support the academic workforce while ensuring the regulation of fair minimum working conditions specific to the unique nature of the lecturer's work; and c) psychological security in terms of the protection of lecturer psychological health and well-being through professional recognition and the enhancement of personal value, respect, trust and overall job satisfaction.”

The contribution of these definitions to the field of HE in SA is significant. Ultimately, when lecturers experience satisfactory legal, environmental and psychological security, they will be secure in their professional identity and committed to act in an accountable manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations will ultimately enhance lecturer accountability and security now that these concepts have been clearly defined:

- Government and institutions should collaborate to develop a sound legislative framework for lecturer accountability, inclusive of a clear definition of teaching quality and a clear delineation of teaching responsibilities with corresponding accountability standards at different post levels that can be contextualised at institutional level.
- A transparent student rights charter should be developed, which can delineate the lecturer's true accountability for student rights protection and customer care.
- Establish a professional body to secure the professional status of the lecturer.
- Develop a fair and transparent mechanism of rigorous peer review for lecturer accountability regulation in teaching practices.
- Employment contracts of lecturers should include the teaching-related responsibilities associated with different post levels and the support and resources that are within the budget and ability of an institution to provide.
- At institutional level, implement awareness campaigns to familiarise lecturers with their rights and with avenues for protection when they experience infringement thereon.
- Develop appropriate minimum conditions of employment specific to the unique work environment of the lecturer, with a focus on the regulation of workload and recognition to enhance lecturer environmental and psychological security.

The implementation of the above recommendations will ultimately make all the difference in how lecturers perceive their accountability and feel valued and secure in their working environment.

CONCLUSION

In the absence of a clear definition in existing literature and legal frameworks for accountability and professional security of lecturers, this study aimed to develop comprehensive understanding and subsequent definitions for these concepts. The study addressed this lacuna by representing the voice of the SA lecturer and offering that voice a more defined place in Higher Education literature through clear definitions of both lecturer accountability and professional security. As one cannot improve what one cannot define, the implementation of the findings from this study will go a long way to sensitise role players in HE to, and ultimately to enhance, the accountability and the professional security of lecturers in their labour environment.

NOTE

1. Due to ethical constraints for non-disclosure, no bibliographical references are provided for the university documents that were reviewed.

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